State of the Web

NC Department of Health and Human Services
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The web is increasingly where DHHS conducts our business. Professional and useful websites are a necessity. Public Affairs is working with all divisions and offices to improve existing sites, and to create a comprehensive redesign site where our site visitors can get things done, easily and efficiently. This third annual "State of the Web" report provides an overview of achievements last year, and what is on the horizon.

Redesigned, reorganized and rewritten Medicaid webpages instantly drew 100% more site visitors to an already highly trafficked area of the DHHS site.

Website certification is key to quality content. All divisions agreed that the process helped identify outdated content. Half of all divisions identified and corrected problems with at least 25% of their webpages.

Accomplished in 2008

➢ **Redesigned DHHS Home**: Unveiled on August 1, 2008, the highly accessible, standards-based website is a first for DHHS. The new design makes it easy for site visitors to find similar content presented in predictable ways, for low-vision users to increase font sizes, and for those who navigate with a keyboard to efficiently tab through the pages.

➢ **Broad Input Made New Design Better**: Extensive usability testing ensured the site was easy to navigate. Reviewers included food stamp applicants, people at senior centers, as well as many division directors across the department. Site visitors were given a "sneak peak" with the ability to comment before the release. A survey of visitors to the new site revealed 82 percent found it very easy to navigate.

➢ **Redesigned Medicaid Consumer Pages:** Medicaid reaches more people than any other single program in the department. The content for this confusing program was rewritten to a 7th grade level, and the new content was incorporated into the redesign unveiled in August. Several usability tests were conducted to hone the information for this audience. The result was an instantaneous jump in web traffic on Medicaid pages by 100 percent.

➢ **Unique Design for Divisions and Offices**: New templates were created to satisfy requests for better division/office branding of pages.

➢ **Spanish Site:** www.ncdhhs.gov/espanol was unveiled in August. For the first time, the department answers some basic questions online for those who are more comfortable with Spanish information.

➢ **Web Governance—Certification**: Every page in all 101 DHHS websites was reviewed for accuracy and timeliness. All divisions/offices reported that this "certification" helped them identify outdated content, and half said 25 percent or more of their pages needed attention.

➢ **Web Governance—Fix Broken Links:** Broken links erode confidence in a website. Until now, checking broken links had been sporadic by the department's webmasters. We now have a monthly "link checking day" helping division web content managers to monitor their website quality.

➢ **Interim Improvements:** More DHHS websites have a high-quality DHHS logo, better division identification, deeper saturation of the search tool, and more consistent and informative title tags for better searching.

Next Steps:

- ➤ **Division and Office Incorporation**: Now that templates are available, several divisions and offices are beginning the process to redesign their websites. The process involves first identifying the purpose, goals, audience and tasks of the site in a web charter. Detailed "wireframes" specify what belongs on each page, and are approved by Public Affairs and the division director before any coding takes place.

- ➤ **Meet challenges for interactive web:** The interactive web (blogs, wikis, and social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn) is on the rise. NC DHHS should begin to use these tools to meet our business goals. Policy development has begun, but appropriate usage and technical issues remain to be worked out.

- ➤ **Mobile DHHS:** The redesigned website will have a version that works on mobile devices such as cellphones.

- ➤ **Training Materials**: Public Affairs will create training materials to help division web writers write for the web, and to help webmasters use the templates.

- ➤ **Spanish Content**: The Spanish site is currently a shell. More programs and services will be added, under the guidance of the department's Bilingual Resource Group.

- ➤ **Interim Improvements, Continued**: With the new Web Standards and Web Style Guide, web content managers and webmasters across the department are working to comply. They will work on consistent webmaster links across the department, use of a webmail form to control spam, and adding appropriate links across divisions for a more inter-connected web presence.

- ➤ **Search Engine Optimization**: DHHS can do a better job of making its complex and multiple websites optimized for commercial search engines, such as Google. Strategies include submitting detailed site maps to search engines and improving behind the scenes "metadata," including page titles. These actions will go far in increasing site traffic and ensuring that the searching public finds valuable pages buried deep in our websites.

- ➤ **Governance, Images**: DHHS has been threatened with lawsuits over images used in websites. Strict governance is needed to ensure that the department is not vulnerable to this threat. Policies will be rewritten, and guidance provided to webmasters and web content managers.

The Comprehensive Website Redesign Project sponsor is DHHS Senior Advisor Linda Povlich. The project director is Lois Nilsen, Office of Public Affairs. For website guidance documents and project updates, go to: ncdhhs.gov/redesignproject .

Speaking plainly: A redesigned website also means we rework our content to use plain language. That involves using the simplest, most straightforward way of expressing an idea. With plain language, the words are effortless to read. It means a webpage is understood the first time it is read.

A web content management system is the most effective and professional way to manage large websites like the department's. Implementation of such a system requires resources: funding and staff. Once the state is past its economic crisis, steps will be taken to put a content management system in place.